

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

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 the dog in need, this is also a place for you. Don't judge a book by its cover. We've all heard that so many times. That is why it's so cliché. Have you ever felt that someone has unfairly judged you based on your cover, your looks, what you're wearing, an expression on your face in a given moment, and all without taking in what you give to the world or what you need from the world to thrive and survive.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I have definitely felt that. In those moments, whether they happened to me as a child or as an adult, I felt small, humiliated, angry, and many times very lonely. But I too have judged and been wrong before. And making mistakes is okay. As long as we are willing to take a look in the mirror and say, "When I'm wrong, or when I do things that hurt others, I need to catch myself. I need to correct myself or be open to being corrected." Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Oh, yes, I'm full of clichés, but they exist because the constant repetition of situations in life bring humanity to the same place over and over again.

So we must be reminded. Judging something or someone based on what our eyes see in a given moment, doesn't determine the meaning, the purpose or the validity of the experience that thing, or being truly represents. You see, no matter how imperfect or perfect our lives look to others, we will all at one time or another go through something where we are not able to function in some way because of it. Even if it is just for a period of time. Whether it is an emotional or physical setback, we may not act or look like our normal selves, and we will need help. We will ask not to be judged, but to be helped.

And since this podcast is about the canine condition, let us take note that many canine companions find themselves in that same predicament. They are so often judged on their looks, their breed, their temperament in the moment that we met them. Many dogs find themselves lost, and misunderstood. They just want to be recognized and accepted. They want to know how to please us. So we will see them for who they are and accept what they need from us. There are many dogs who are considered special needs dogs due to a physical or neurological disorder. And all they ask is not to be judged, but to be helped. Dogs with special needs, better yet special abilities are some of the most loving, free and soulful beings. They teach us about overcoming obstacles and getting back up every time we fall. When we help them, they thrive. My guest on the podcast today has firsthand experience with these resilient and most lovable dogs.

She is the founder of the Be Like Josh Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating humans and animals with special needs. Through their work, the foundation's message is that all animals and people, wherever they are on the spectrum of abilities are worthy of being seen, loved and appreciated. My guest today is Kimberly Elliott and Josh is her Labradoodle who has cerebellar hypoplasia and is the happiest dog you'll ever meet. Welcome to the podcast, Kimberly.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Hi. Thank you so much.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I'm so excited to have you here for this episode. And before we get to talking, I would like to let our listeners know how Kimberly and I met. It's actually a flashback about a flashback story. This was two years ago. I was on a job and on a break, I was talking about dogs, which is not uncommon for me. And one of my friends said, "Oh my gosh, you have to follow Josh the Doodle on Instagram. So of course I follow mostly dogs in that so many people. And I said, "Absolutely, let me get on that." So I go on my Instagram, I look up Josh the Doodle, I click follow, and I start to look at the Insta Story.

And that same day I kid you not Kimberly, you had done a flashback or a throwback to some photos, and I see myself in your Insta Story. So at this point, I'm really confused. I'm like, "Wait a minute. That's me, and that's my husband, Johnny, what the heck? What is going on?" And of course I connect the dots and it reminds me that we had been in Mesa, Arizona interviewing Freedom Tails Rescue.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah. Freedom Tails.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And you and Andrew were adopting Ben on the day that we did the shoot with them.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Oh my gosh.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

So we interviewed Andrew for that, and now flash forward to this Instagram account that belongs to Josh and you and Andrew are his parents.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Isn't that bizarre?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I thought that was the coolest thing. I thought what a small world. And then I reached out to you and here we are.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Here we are.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

So many years later.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes. So having met you with Ben first, gorgeous Ben, can we talk about Ben for a minute?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Of course everybody loves Ben. Yes.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes. You've been very open about some of the challenges you were presented with after his adoption. Can you share with us what those challenges were? Why you didn't return him to the rescue and make it someone else's problem. As so many families do when they adopt a dog and he's not perfect?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

We adopted Ben, and I think it's important that people know how I adopted Ben. We had previously lost our Goldendoodle whom we bought from a breeder. It was a family friend was breeding within her home. She had a male standard and she had a female Mack and Molly. Mack and Molly loved each other. And they made a few litters of puppies and she sold them at a very, very low price to close friends and family that wanted to have those traits. So that's where my mindset was at in my life when I got my doodle. We also had a rescue lab. But I wasn't like a hardcore rescuer rescue advocate.

So anyways, I love my Goldendoodle and he suddenly passed from liver failure. It was like, wham, bam, thank you ma'am. And it was really, really traumatizing. So, Andrew and I, we were really shaken up. I think that was like the first like real loss Andrew's ever had in his life. So we were really traumatized, but I found myself longing for him. I literally entered into the idea and the process of rescuing another doodle to replace that energy that was lost in my home. My brain believed that I was going to go get another Goldendoodle and it would feel like it did with Doug.

And it's really important that people know this because that unrealistic expectation is really what set the stage for what came into our home. Because I looked and I was turned down by so many rescues. Finding a Goldendoodle in rescue is a lot like finding a French bulldog or a unicorn.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

You're not wrong there. You're not wrong there. You can wait, you can be patient and it'll happen but...

**Kimberly Elliott:**

It takes a long time. You have to be on a wait list, and I like most people am impatient. And so one day I was on Petfinder and I came across this picture of Ben. They had him listed as a Wheaten Terrier mix. But I took a look in my doodle searching eyes, looked and I kept saying, "Andrew, this looks like a doodle. This looks like a Labradoodle. This is a doodle." You can tell I was so fixated on doodle. I wasn't like, "Who is this dog? What is he about? What's his background?" My brain does said, "Doodle. I need a doodle. I need a doodle." I see this now running my own rescue how people are hell bent on, "I'm here for a Husky." They don't say I've done research on Huskies. Here's our family life. Do you think the Husky you have is a fit for me? They're just like this linear thinking. And so that's where I was at.

So I see Ben, I adopt Ben and yada, yada, yada. I'm going to say yada, yada yada, right? Because I go on forever. But we go to our meet and greet and within two minutes, Andrew's on the floor and Ben's jumping on them and kissing them. And Andrew's like, "Oh my god, we have to adopt them." And that was literally it. There was no interview, talking about Ben, nothing. She was just like, "You guys were really persistent. You must really want him." I'm like, "Yeah, we really want them." We paid our money. We got our dog. And that was the day you interviewed Andrew. And then we brought him home. Now, our Goldendoodle was very calm. He was very polite. He never destroyed anything. There were no issues. I never dealt with behavioral issues.

Well, when Ben came to live with us, that night we literally sat down. We didn't have a dining room table at the time. So we sat down with our plate, our dinner plate in front of the TV on the sofa. And I kid you not, Jackie, Ben comes running through the living room and snatches a hamburger right out of Andrew's hand as he's bringing it to his mouth. We were like, "What just happened?" Was that a fluke? No. Ben was counter surfing. He attacked our senior lab. He had resource guarding. He had food aggression. He had zero boundaries, zero structure. He was the most energetic dog I've ever met. He was wired. You could not exercise the energy out of him.

He had no interest in listening to commands. So we tried to tough it out for a few weeks. Yeah. And then I reached out to the rescue and I remember they told me when I adopted him, "We have a trainer that works with our rescue and he'll come and work with you guys for a discounted rate if you need a trainer." "Oh, I don't need a trainer. What's a trainer going to tell me. I've owned dogs before. I know dogs." This is a dog. It's a dog. I got a dog door. I like dogs. I like to throw the ball for dogs. He's going to be a happy dog. I never stopped to think that the personalities of dogs vary just like the personalities of people. I've also learned that most people like me back then, they don't really know dogs. You can love dogs without really understanding canines and how they work, but that's a whole other podcasts.

So anyway, basically if you can name a problem, Ben had it. He destroyed stuff in the house. Yes. The only thing he didn't do was lift his leg in the house. That's the only thing he didn't do shockingly. All of his stuff is like rooted in like defiance. He wants to be in charge. Obviously, I pushed back against that. We really butted heads. So, I had the trainer come in and work with us and stuff. And that's when we learned that Ben's issues is not learning boundaries. It's accepting them. And the reason why Ben was and still is the most challenging dog I've ever owned or worked with is because one thing that's very unique to him is that when I set a boundary, he gets angry at me for setting it, and he never backs down. Like if I reprimand any other dog in my house, they kind of cower, "Oh no, I've disappointed you." Not Ben. He goes, "Oh really B. What you've got for me now?" That's like how we act.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh, no.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yes, for real. To this day, to this day.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Wow, Ben.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah. So anyways, this is really about he transformed us from being dog lovers to dog advocates. He transformed us because we had to literally invest in training and prioritizing structure and boundaries. And putting all these crates in my house and these elevated pet cots and working place training and all this stuff that is not fun, but it fascinated me.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes. Me too.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

It's rooted in discipline and structure and boundaries. And that's something that I think humans seek on a deeper level. I'm a personal trainer, and as a personal trainer, I see how people struggle. Human struggle with their own structure and boundaries and self control and discipline in their life. They want those things, but they struggle. So they hire me to teach them. And that's what it felt like with Ben. It felt like I was meeting a client covered in fur, but I loved it. I loved it though, because I love being coached. I find value in that. But I think that a lot of people feel threatened and criticized and burdened by training. And so you had asked me like, why didn't we return them to the rescue? It just never entered my mind. It's my personality. I like challenge. That's what like gets me going.

When someone challenges me, I'll fight to the death, but that's my personality. I think most people aren't like that. They don't have room for that. If we had kids or we had any sort of different setup, I don't know that I would have invested what I did in Ben. I don't know. I'd like to think that I would do the same thing if I was different than who I am, but I'll never know. Does that make sense?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes, because I've been presented with challenges and how I came across the first dog that challenged me to either say either get this dog trained or I can not keep her, but I love her to the death. And she's my soul dog to this day. She's 11 now, but she was a horse. I could not keep up with her. She's a Pit Bull Great Dane mix.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Oh, wow.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And I only had pugs. So yes, to my listeners who've heard the first episode of my podcast, I expand on this in the first couple episodes because the journey for me was coming from a background of being afraid of dogs, growing up scared and not liking dogs until well into adulthood.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Wow. What a turnaround. I have to admit something though, and this is really hard for baby bleeding heart people on my page to understand. Like when you said I loved that dog. I didn't love Ben. And even to this day, the emotions that I feel for Ben... there's love there, but it's not like the way I love Josh or I love so many other dogs. It's so strained because there is this defiance, and so for me, I can never let my guard down with Ben. I can never be vulnerable. I am strictly in a role of providing for him. I provide. I think there's a motherly instinct there. But that's what really catapulted me into rescue I think was seeing that even though I didn't love Ben the way I love Josh, because that's such a different type of love. But yet I still didn't want him to leave my home. I wanted to be his provider. I wanted to be his handler.

I don't even know what that is. I just felt like it was intrinsically my duty. Like I just felt it in me. There was never like a, "Let's talk about this, honey, do we want to do this?" It was just like, this is what we're doing. This is the next step. And I know Andrew felt the same way. And so we love Ben now because we've had him in our home for so long and he's our guy. But we don't love him the way we love some of our other dogs. Like Andrew has a special relationship with George that only exists between them.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And that happens, we have a pack and Johnny has certain relationships with certain ones and I have with others, but they're all my babies and you have a role with each of them.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah, but it really did catapult me into rescue, and it set me up so that I started to view these dogs coming into my home. Like I had a duty to them and that I didn't have to love them. I think a lot of rescuers fall in love with every dog, and I think that's how they get in that. I'm in over my head slippery slope. When I look at all dogs, including my dogs, I really look at what do they need? How can I provide it to them versus what do they give me? What they give me back, I rarely look at, do you know what I'm saying? I'm so deeply entrenched in being their handler and like fulfilling their needs and I think that's why I like working with disabled dogs truly, is because it's just an honor and I feel it's my duty because I do understand them and I see them for who they really are.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

So you see your role as I am a part of this part of the journey, but you're willing to let go.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah, yes. I am willing to let go.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

It's a big step and if more of us were willing to do that, I think that it would help us save more and get more involved. More people would foster, more people would adopt. So that's a really key point to bring up. I'm glad you brought that up. Let's talk about Josh. Your beautiful labradoodle. So he has a condition called cerebellar hypoplasia correct?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yes. Yes.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Tell us what that is and why do dogs get it.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

It is not what people think, it is not "Oh, bless his heart. Poor soul, Oh my God." It's just like any other trait, right? Your Goldendoodle has white hair, my Goldendoodle has Auburn hair. Your Goldendoodle runs around in a straight line, my Goldendoodle can't. It's just a trait. So cerebellar hypoplasia is merely the cerebellum, which is a part of the lobe of the brain that actually everyone thinks that it controls motor function. It refines motor function. It's not where we initiate our motor function. That actually comes from our M1 motor cortex, but our cerebellum refines our motor function. It's how we can touch our fingertips to the tip of our nose, how we can lift our water bottle to our mouth and all those things. It's like the field sobriety test, essentially of motor function and his is just underdeveloped, and that is on a sliding scale.

There's also something called cerebellar aplasia, which is the complete absence of a cerebellum. And people always want to ask me, well, what caused this? There are so many different things. If you have a cerebellum, whether you're a dog an elephant or a person, you are prone to being born with an underdeveloped cerebellum, it's just something that happens.

Yeah. So he has an underdeveloped cerebellum, and it's not a cognitive disability. He's extremely intelligent, he's present, he gets it. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer for when he hears like the command sit. It takes him longer for that command to then signal for his body to do it, but he can execute, sit. He can execute, come to me. We're working on place, but yeah, it's just an under-development of his motor function.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Tell us how you met Josh. How did the journey begin with you and Andrew getting Josh and starting your journey together?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Well, it's actually a play off of Ben. So you know the story of how we got Ben and we got Josh almost a year later, it was about 10, 11 months later. I had been diligently working with Ben and by this time now a year with Ben, I was like deeply entrenched in the rescue world here in Phoenix, Arizona. I was fostering, I was working with a small organization that was just me and one other woman, my friend, Michelle, her organization is called, Take Me Home Arizona. And she sort of specialized in labs, specifically black labs and large breed dogs, seniors and that kind of thing. We'd pull from the shelter and this and that, and we ended up work on Facebook and I became really well-known in the rescue community here locally through social media because I would do all of our posts and I would connect. I would list the dogs that were adoptable and this and that.

And so I began following a lot of rescue pages and one Sunday morning, I'm sipping my coffee and Andrew was still sleeping. So keep in mind, right? I lost my Goldendoodle, then I got Ben. He did not quite fulfill my needs. So I still have that yearning, burning desire inside me. I'm deeply entrenched in the rescue world, and I still am not seeing any Goldendoodles. And there crosses my feed, this local rescue, the farm rescue says, "fosters needed special needs, Goldendoodle." And I was like, all I saw was Goldendoodle. I'm like, what special needs? What's that even mean? And so I read the description and they showed a picture of puppy, Josh. And I was like, "Oh my God, he's a red Goldendoodle."

Like all the superficial things, right? Like, "Oh, he's a red. Oh." And so I read it and they said, you need to have a flexible schedule where you can take him to regular physical therapy appointments. And I did corrective exercise and some physical therapy modalities as a personal trainer, and I had a flexible schedule and I'm like, "Oh, and I'm Kimberly Elliot." Everyone knows me in the rescue community. And sure as shit, they were like, "Oh my God, you want to foster him? Great. We'll bring him by for you to meet him."

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Wow.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

And that was it. They brought me this wobbly Teddy bear.



**Jacqueline Pinol:**

He was a puppy?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

He was 10 months old and they bring him to me, and this was before I learned about harnesses with handles and all those things. And here, he's just this wobbly ball of fur and it's in my front lawn of my house and they sat him down and he's like vibrating. This is back when he just was not as healthy as he is now, because like this condition sometimes has like, nutrient deficiencies and some other things that can totally be helped. And then the dog's vital life force comes back stronger and stuff. But yeah, they're not sickly, they just have this neurological disability, but it oftentimes there are nutrient deficiencies and other things that go with it. And so he had these other symptoms, like he could not walk at all. He could barely stand up. He's just a shaking vibrating thing.

But you could see that he was happy, like that gut read, you get of something where you're like, "Okay, this is good energy. Or this is sad energy." It was good energy. Like, I could feel that in my solar plexus, but my rational brain was like, how in the blank am I going to do this? Like, what is this? Is he potty trained? Like how's he go to the bathroom? What do you do with him? I remember my brain's in like structured pack walks because I've been working with a trainer. How do I walk him? He can't play fetch.

So all of a sudden now I switch back into rescuer role and I'm like, it doesn't matter. You're just his foster. And I said to them, I said, I looked at them and I'm like, "I love him. He's perfect." And I got totally emotional. But then the next day I called them and I said, "So, listen, let's just be honest with each other. We're both in rescue." Like I get all serious with Pam. She's one of the founders of the farm rescue, they're like family. Now I'm like, "Look, if I think that this dog is suffering, is euthanasia on the table?"

It is so bizarre that I even thought that because people say that to me now, and I want to smack their face. I'm like, "Disability does not equal euthanasia you dummy." [crosstalk 00:24:20] I was the dummy. I didn't know, I never saw anything like it, it was crazy. And so thus began this journey of Andrew and I being like, how do we do this? But once again, it was a challenge. And so we were like, "Oh, bring it on, let's do it."

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Gotcha. Okay. And so you have Josh and you start this journey. Do you sort of figure it out as you go? Or did you have some training and guidance from the rescue? Did they also have to kind of figure it out as you go?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

This is why I'm so proud of my organization because there was no this, there was no cerebellar condition organization when I got Josh. They had never seen cerebellar hypoplasia. They and I were both on Google Googling cerebellar hypoplasia, which there is very little information if you Wikipedia cerebellar hypoplasia. It's basically like they wobble, they lack balance, they live a typical lifespan. That's basically all they tell you. So yeah, it was figured out as we go. And so one of my clients was like, "Hey," they brought in this yellow wagon. They had this Costco foldable wagon. They're like, "Hey, we have this utility wagon. We thought it might be good for your new foster dog." And I thought like, what am I going to do? Pull a wagon around with a dog in it. Like, I'm not going to do that.



But you know what? We did. We filled it with pillows because we thought he was a fabric. We thought he was going to break. And with all these dog beds and pillows in this wagon, and we literally took him for a walk. I'll never forget it. We were in the dark and we were walking like Ben and George, and we were pulling this wagon and we look back and he's just like, and now the viewers or the listeners at home aren't going to be able to see my face? But it's this open gaping mouth, like a dog smiling. And he was propped up in this wagon like, Oh my God, this is so cool. And you could feel it. He was into it, he loved it. And so like in that moment, I think it clicked for us. We need to bridge this gap between his disability and the world we live in.

And I think Andrew and I, we've always been great teammates. Like we've run our personal training business together for over 10 years. And like, we always have each other's backs. And so we talked that night and I'm like, "Are we going to do this? Like, are you in? Are we doing this?" And he's like, "Yeah, totally. We'll make it work." And I think knowing we had each other to help, we just knew that like together, we would work as a team and we would figure it out. And then that's exactly, the first couple of years we had him, that's all we did was experiment. Which, what kind of challenges can we face with Josh? I mean, we've gone hiking and backpacking with him in a backpack. We've pulled him in wagons. We have different bike buggies, two different types of bike buggies that we pull behind our bikes.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh my gosh! No wonder he's such a happy dog, what a life.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah. We have pull wagons, we have push wagons. We have so many different types of booties. We have wheelchair, it's just have wheels, we'll travel. Essentially[crosstalk 00:27:21]. We just bring him everywhere.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

How far along after you had him, did you start the foundation? How long has Be Like Josh Foundation been in existence?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

So I got him in the fall of 2017. I lost my dad, which was sort of the thing that catapulted it as well, in May, 2018. I think it was like that fall that I started talking about it. So I don't know. I guess, I mean, we've only really been up and running like a year and a half to be honest and it was probably like a thought for like six to nine months prior. So it hasn't been that long.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

But there was a need. I mean, you've clearly seen the response, right? From the foundation.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Oh yeah. So I first started sharing Josh on social media in December of 2017. And it was because I also marketed my personal training business on Facebook. And so what was happening is like, all of my posts were like fitness, fitness, fitness, and I was getting all these clients and then Josh entered my life. And all of a sudden, all I did was post Josh because I was obsessed. I'm like, "Look at what he can do. Here he is

drinking water, here he is standing up." Like everything he did was absolute magic. Think like brand new first-time mom with a beautiful nine month old baby.

Like your entire feed is your baby, right? Yeah and this is my baby. So someone said, "Hey, you should start like an Instagram page for Josh. So people could just like follow his journey." And so I'm like, "Okay." So I did, and the Dodo reached out not long after. And so when the Dodo did a story on Josh, our page blew up and all of a sudden these people were coming in from all over. And you can imagine the different narratives that were like in the comments and stuff, right? And right away, it hit me. I'm like, this feels cheapened and no shade to the Dodo. I love the Dodo...

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Oh me too.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Right, I love them. All of a sudden, I felt like I cheapened Josh. I can never stress how much I love Josh. I know that people love Josh because he's Josh. But I loved him before he was quote unquote, Josh the Doodle. Like his vulnerability and his trust and him minus his disability, who he is, is such a special dog. And then yes, he does have this disability that makes him walk and move really funny. So he looks like an animatronic kind of Teddy bear. He's very unique, but I knew him before he was, this like celebrity guy, right? I knew him before he was the Brad Pitt of dogs on social media. And so when this hullabaloo about Josh started happening, I started to feel like they don't know him.

And I had this deep desire to start really telling more about him, but then I lost my dad in a tragic accident. Yeah, and like all of a sudden life just shifted and everything in my world needed purpose. Everything needed like this deeper message, because you know we've talked about this, right? Like when you are going through immense grief, everything feels so detached and superficial, right? And so here I have this special dog, I had this immense grief and then I'm on social media, which is not a good combination. Josh is such high level of needs, and I was grieving so deeply that I had to get out of bed to care for him. Yeah, I had to get out of bed to work my job, but I could do that on autopilot, but to be with Josh, I was present.

And so I had this idea. I'm like, I don't want Josh to just be some Instagram famous dog, like "Oh, look at that wobbly, cute Goldendoodle." I was like, there is a story here. There is a message here. And this was before I even knew what my message was because now I'm like, I'm so deep in it, right? I'm so deep in it. But then it was just like, I wanted people to know that Josh was more than that. And so I came up with this idea of like The Be Like Josh Foundation, but it was just this concept. It was so loose. Then as I lived with Josh longer, it started to take shape. And I realized that I wanted to educate people about inclusion. The Be Like Josh Foundation is actually a community outreach program that is rooted in awareness and advocacy for inclusion.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

It's wonderful.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Starting with dogs with disabilities and this includes educating clinicians because what a lot of people don't know is that dogs like Josh are rare because until just recently, very recently, like in the last two years, veterinarians recommend euthanasia first and foremost for neurological disabilities. The diagnostics are expensive, people don't know how to advocate and so there's this talk about quality of

life. It's not that the dog has a poor quality of life because of the disability. The dog is prone to a poor quality of life if the handler doesn't know how to advocate. And we already struggle with handlers not advocating, that's why there's a rescue epidemic. So when you add in neurological disability, it's like, I think clinicians are just like, where do we go from here?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

It's too much. They feel like it's too much but it's doable.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

It's totally doable, right? So it was really about raising awareness and I'm like, I want to talk to kids because I was bullied in school, I didn't learn about compassion, inclusion and any of that stuff, but I know that Josh is such a celebrity and I know that kids are on social media. So I thought, okay, if kids think that Josh is a celebrity and they're on social media and they want to be tagged with Josh the Doodle and get their picture with Josh, the doodle, well, maybe they might hear Josh, the doodle story, and maybe they might hear his message.

So I really wanted the opportunity to take Josh around and talk about what it's like living with him and who he's all about. And I wanted the kids to get hands-on and feel his wobbly body and see his mobility aids and see his wheelchair and ask questions. And I wanted to have these conversations where they didn't have to have the perfect language and I could teach them inclusive language, right?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

You started a youth program, right? With the foundation.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yes. That's what it was. And then I remember I told my rescue partner, Jenny, Jenny who owns Josh's sister, all of the tiny doodle, we wanted to go and like take our dogs to schools and teach. But then we also realized we have to show the world that it's not just Josh, that is amazing with this disability. Since then, The Be Like Josh foundation is known to be the neurological disabilities organization for cerebellar disorder. So now I'm inundated daily with requests for dogs with disabilities. So when COVID hit, we couldn't really visit schools. So I'm like, well, we do have a lot of really generous supporters. We have the funds, let's save more dogs. Well, next thing I know we're now primarily just a special, we're a dogs with disabilities rescue, that's what we are. And that's great and I love it, but I missed educating.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Of course.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

I missed these opportunities.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yeah. And I'm sure, we will get back to that. Especially if you seem like the kind of person who's going to stay on message and standpoint, you're going to go back to the first chance you get. But I also find it so interesting that because we've all had to shift our lifestyle and what we can and cannot do during these COVID times that you've been taken on this journey to find out there are so many other dogs that need your knowledge and your message and your voice, and to bring more people on board to learn about

that. I had no idea and I learned so much just following Josh. And I've seen the Huskies that you've posted. You said Josh's sister and she's the tiny doodle. Does she also have cerebellum hypoplasia?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah. So from Josh's breeder, there were seven cerebellar dogs that we knew of across a few different litters. After Josh kinda got out there. I actually had someone who worked at the breeders kennel reach out to me and tell me all the behind the scenes stuff that was going on. That's how I know what happened there. So there was talk of parvo in December running rampant here and there, but also my veterinarian was her veterinarian, yes, that's right. And he did the insemination of her dogs and he knew that there was a male parent that had this in his lineage. And so any litter born from that male was producing a CH doodle.

So in Josh's case, it is a genetic, it's not distemper, it's not parvo. So interestingly enough, that's how we knew. And so word has it that she sterilized the male and has retired him. I don't know, she's gone off grid. She won't have contact with me, which is fine, it's not a big deal.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yeah. It's unfortunate when we meet people that we want to help, that we know we could help and it's not about shaming them or accusing them of anything if they literally didn't know, or if they did know, and they're willing to change their mind and come forward, I'm always game for that. But if you're going to continue to hurt the message and go against what is right then I'm just not having any of it.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Well, yeah. I mean, absolutely. Olive is a sibling. It's a different litter. It's not a litter mate, the same lineage. So there's Katie, the doodle, Billy, the doodle, Olive, the tiny doodle and then Josh, the doodle, they're all from three different litters, but they're all from the same breeder, same male. It's been traced back to [crosstalk 00:36:58]

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

I follow Katie, the doodle, she's amazing. She was with you and I found out about her because you were fostering her.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Yeah, and Billy too, he's adorable. So he lives in the OC or he lives in Laguna, yeah.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

What are some of the misconceptions now that you talk about all the people that came onto your page and found out about you through the Dodo and thereafter, because of all the knowledge that you share and the experiences of these dogs with certain disabilities, what are the misconceptions people have about Josh or other dogs that have similar neurological conditions?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Oh my God, where do I start? The first one is they're suffering. Now that I've been doing neurological disability rescue, there are some cases where there were dogs that were suffering. If they are pushing back against their disability and they're having agitation and frustration chronically to the point where they're acting out or they're self harming, this happens, then yes you have to let them go because

they're suffering. But that is so rare and it's not typical for cerebellar hypoplasia. We've had a lot of other neurological disabilities that aren't cerebellar hypoplasia, that are more severe. But the number one misconception is that the dogs are suffering. They're not suffering and I always tell them, I'm like, when you've had five Margarita's and you're wobbly and drunk, are you suffering? Or are you feeling no pain? It's not exactly the same, but it's essentially... all it is, is like a disconnection of the motor control? So if the dog is not frustrated or agitated, they are not suffering. They're not in pain. It is not progressive, meaning it does not get worse, it's totally static. So what you see today is what you'll see in years from now and they don't have a frame of reference. Cerebellar hypoplasia comes on so early when they're just puppies or they're born with it essentially. It's in those few initial, developing weeks. They don't know anything else. It's not like they're running around playing fetch and doing agility things and then all of a sudden they can't. The other misconception is that I'm showboating him for likes and follows, which that's more like against me.

So it's fine, but what's important to note is that two things. Number one, you have the right to live your truth. And just because our reality is different than yours, that doesn't mean I'm showboating. I'm just saying, "Hey, this is my dog." Josh is an amazing dog. He also has a disability. Has disabilities is part of the conversation. It's not the whole conversation. I actually like to highlight my dogs for their personalities more than their disability, but people are always so intrigued by the disability. So I do address it. And then the other one is poor, poor dog. That's so sad. Again, ableism. It's like what society views someone with a disability and like, "Oh, that's so sad. I should count my blessings." They're counting their blessings. We all have different blessings.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Absolutely. So, quick to judge. I wanted to bring something up that you posted about recently that you share the people apply to adopt some of the dogs at the Be Like Josh Foundation to have them be possibly therapy dogs for people with disabilities. Can you expand on that and why that's not a good idea?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

To be totally specific, the common narrative I get is, "Oh, I'd love to adopt this dog so it can be a therapy dog for children with disabilities, or it can visit different occupational therapy settings and things, and connect with children who have disabilities." And so it's frustrates me because I can tell that while they may have good intentions, I can tell that they are not in the right mindset to be a handler and a service human for a dog with a disability. To be service human for a dog with a disability, the way I am Josh's service handler, is to empower them, and to let them tell you who they want to be. You don't write the narrative onto a dog because it has a disability, which almost always aligns in their mind with people with disabilities. People with disabilities and dogs with disabilities still just want to exist in the world as people in dogs.

Their disability doesn't have to be their signifier. It doesn't have to be the conversation all the time. Josh has a great disposition for being a therapy dog or visiting schools or all those things. He enjoys that stuff. Ford would not. My foster dog, Bitey Ford, who also has cerebellar hypoplasia, he would not be great at that. Because he gets so wound up, and when he gets wound up, he gets really frustrated and he makes all these noises, and then he bites. He doesn't bite ferociously, but he gets his frustration out of his mouth. He would not be good going to schools and visiting children. But see people don't ask me, "Hey, do you think this dog might want to be of service or any service role?" And then my next question is, "Is that what you do for a living? Like, do you work with children who have disabilities or are you an occupational therapist?" Because another thing is, people are just like all of a sudden want to become

this volunteer in a role they've never been in and bring this dog along with them. It's like, where is this coming from?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

And I know people have good intentions, but sometimes we have to really ask ourselves, why do we want to do this? Are we doing it for this dog, for what they need, or am I doing it for me?

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Exactly. And people love to say, "Well, that wasn't my intention." Well, you can still cause harm even if you have good intentions, because it's not about you. You're hurting the mission and the empowerment that I'm trying to teach behind dogs with disabilities. Can I give a little tip to your listeners?

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Yes, please.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Okay. If you're listening to this podcast and you would like to adopt a dog from a rescue and you feel like you have been turned down in the past, here's a little tip. Don't go in talking, go in asking. Ask questions. I'm interested in Brody. Would he like to live with two small children? Would he enjoy living with a 80 pound Doberman? Would he enjoy being in a kennel, or could he be in a kennel six to eight hours a day while I work? Ask questions. Because if you're asking me if this dog can fit into your life, that means you care about the dog. But when you come in telling me this vision that you have for the dog without knowing anything about it, I'm like, "Oh no, sister, we got to tap the brakes." So ask questions, ask questions.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

That is a very good tip because also those of us who advocate or the rescues who do this day in and day out can also find you a match. And it may not be the dog that you saw with your eyes and thought I have to have that, but it might be another dog that is actually your match. And you will have found them because you ask questions and you were open to listening and receiving information. I'm glad that you take time to obviously advocate, but also to be selective.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Very selected. I have to be. I believe that my journey with Josh, it was supposed to be out here on social media to teach people to tap into their humanity. I believe it is my job to share Josh and challenge people to tap into their own humanity, change their own narrative. The way we treat each other, there will be a trickle down to the animals, but it's probably not going to happen in my lifetime. I really think we're that far off from having a complete cultural shift. So what keeps me going is this transformational shift that I've had, has literally been because of the work I've done with Josh.

If it can happen for me, it can happen for someone else because I am not special. I am not gifted. I'm not special. I am like your average every day, born poor in Detroit, made it out West, flunked out of college, personal trainer. Like, we're not special. We're Kimberly and Andrew. We just had this opportunity to love someone like Josh and we're loving him and it's like eye opening. And that's what's so beautiful is I think people have to understand that because we love and rescue dogs, we're not special. We're just like you, you're just like me. And all we're saying is, hey, if more of us could just help these innocent beings

who didn't ask to be born and left behind, then maybe there will be less of them. If we are just a little bit more conscious in our choices from day to day.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Tell us where can our listeners find the Be Like Josh Foundation on social media or a website so we can send our listeners to follow you.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

Our webpage is belikejosh.org. Instagram is sort of my main platform. So it's @Josthedoodle all one word on Instagram. If people want to really dig deep and pull back all the layers of all the other dogs in our pack and some off-color humor, they can follow Andrew my husband on TikTok and he's father of paws @fatherofpaws all one word.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Awesome. And we are going to have all of the organizations live links in the show notes for this episode on our podcast channel. Also our listeners should know that I am not getting paid to advocate for any organization on this podcast. I choose to interview people and cover organizations that I know are doing the good work for dogs and for people across America and around the world. The Be Like Josh Foundation has the canine condition seal of approval from me. Kimberly, thank you so much for everything that you do, for being my guests and sharing Josh and your foundation's mission with us today.

**Kimberly Elliott:**

It's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate the dialogue. It's great.

**Jacqueline Pinol:**

Of course. Thank you. And don't forget. Be Like Josh the Doodle and follow his Instagram page. I would like to leave you our listeners with this beautiful letter that Kimberly wrote to Josh and posted on Josh the Doodles Instagram page. Dear Josh, I love you so much, it hurts. You inspire me and you inspire others. You bring me joy. You have helped me find my place in this world despite feeling lost for years. You are everything pure and good in this world. You have saved dogs and people alike. You have created awareness and you have started a movement all because you are you. That's it. You're just yourself. Perfectly imperfect, fuzzy, and flailing. You have connected people from all over the world and help them to feel included.

You are the ultimate underdog, and we are all rooting for you. You're amazing, Josh, simply amazing. I'm honored to know you, love you and tell your story. Love, Kimberly. And with that my friends, I invite you to write a letter to someone, canine or human, who inspires you. A kind word can always bring joy to both sender and receiver. Thanks for tuning in. And if you enjoyed this episode, please tell a friend. Until next time, hang onto those leashes. The Canine Condition. Come, sit, stay.