



Episode: #61

Lessons of Recovery: The Night My Dog Almost Died

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Imagine grooming your dog and you spot what you think is a little clump of dead white fur around her armpit. So, you go to pluck it out and it doesn't come out like fur. And you think, well, is it stuck on her fur? It's not really part of her fur? And so, you start pulling. And somewhere around inch two and inch four, you realize this could be a worm, but it's coming out of my dog's armpit. And you keep pulling and you keep pulling and now might be a good place for those of you watching on YouTube to go ahead and hit the like button. In empathy of what I'm going through here.

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You keep pulling until you get a 10-inch worm out of your dog's body. This really happened, this isn't Sci-fi, it really happened to me. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I'm going to share with you six incredibly valuable lessons that I learned working through a near-death experience with one of my dogs.

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To understand it, let me tell you about Encore. Encore is my oldest dog. And I knew I wanted a dog related to that dog, Stoni. Encore was related to her. However, all the puppies were spoken for. There was a possibility I could have last pick.

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And I said, I see the pup—I saw the puppies and I knew the one I wanted. Lo and behold making a long story short, Encore ended up being my puppy. And she was amazing at everything she did. Most of all, she was a phenomenal family pet. But she was amazing at obedience. She was amazing at agility. She won a silver medal at a first world championships in jumpers. When she won the US national championships in agility, she beat the second-place dog by two seconds. She was so fast. Everyone just loved watching Encore do agility.

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When she was a five-year old dog, I noticed some rather weird things starting to happen to her. We have just two steps here in the house, and I noticed that she would trip sometimes going up these steps. She'd catch herself, but she would trip going up the step, which I thought was weird. She would sometimes at night, just start circling the kitchen, not sniffing, just pacing in circles for hours.

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She would sometimes in agility go to the base of a jump. And instead of jumping over it just collapse. Now we did a tick panel at the time John and I, my late husband, we used to spend a lot of time in the winter in Florida. One of these tests came back positive, but we did many after and they never did. So, Encore was put on a series of Doxycycline, an antibiotic to treat Lyme disease. And all of those neurological symptoms would go away. A year later, they would come back. This went on until she was an eight-year-old dog. John and I had taken the RV to Florida where I was competing at the AKC invitationals with Feature. And it was the night before our, my first run when I got a call from Lynda Orton-Hill.



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Actually, not true. The call was from my good friend, Dr. Leslie Woodcock, a veterinarian. Lynda was too upset to talk to me. But Lynda was on site in charge when Encore had a seizure that couldn't be stopped. Lynda rushed her to the veterinarian, the emergency veterinarian, they could not stop these seizures. So, they put her into a chemically induced coma.

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John and I packed up the RV and we started the 21-hour drive home. Bless his heart, John drove almost the entire way without a stop. When I got to Encore's side, she was unable to move. They were able to get her out of the coma and get her to a neurological hospital. There was a great team of supporters, veterinarians, and people that helped Lynda.

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And you can read about that on my blog. [There's three posts about this](#). The first lesson that I have for you about this experience is a really important one for every single person who owns a pet. And that is what is your critical care solution? Do you have pet insurance for your animal? And if you don't have pet insurance, what is your hard stop?

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If you get into a situation like I did, what is the number that you can pay to save your dog's life? You should make that decision now. So that when you get into that situation, you can know I've got to make the tough decision and let my dog go. Now luckily for me, I was in a position where I could pay the veterinarian bills. But please take that seriously. I would strongly encourage everybody to get pet insurance on their animals. But if you don't, what is your number? What is that hard stop?

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If you have children, this is important. You've got a family to feed. Anyone with animals has to make that decision. So, I walked in with Encore and she was at that time paralyzed, she stayed in the hospital for a week. That first day when I walked in, was the first time they saw her move. She wagged her tail, tried to lift her head when I came in. And I would stay with her as much as I could, and the clinic was very good. I remember one veterinarian technician who made all the difference in the world. As I would be trying to hold back my tears and I would talk to Encore and I'd tell her how much she's loved, and I'd ask her to fight.

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And that could be an extra bonus lesson. Talk to your dogs like they were human. Talk to them because how do we know what they do and do not hear from us? So, talk to them, take the time to talk to them like you acknowledge there's a possibility that they get it. And don't just do it when they're sick. Do it every day.

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I remember this vet tech, she would walk by and she would just under her breath say to me softly, she would walk by doing what she did, she would say the brain is a remarkable organ. And she would say that over and over and over. And to give me hope, to make me believe that this dog would be able to move. And she did. When Encore came home a week later, she had some symptoms. She was incontinent. She couldn't control her bladder.



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So, wherever she'd laid, when she'd get up, there was some urine that had to be cleaned up. She was able to stand and walk a little bit assisted, but she didn't really have use of the right side of her body very well. And of course, she's had a spinal tap so she's got this big diamond shape shaved at the back of her neck. She was sent home on high doses of meds to control the seizing and high, high doses of steroids. And so that brings me up to lesson number three, you've got all the notes from the veterinarian, but don't be afraid to look outside the box.

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So, a very dear friend of mine and our chiropractor, she said to me, try this therapy. And so, because Encore was paralyzed on the right side of her body, what we would do is we would put a light for one minute, just a penlight flashlight to show light through her opposite side of her brain to her left eye. And we would play Mozart for one minute at a time to try to stimulate her brain. And to try and stimulate movement in the paralyzed limbs, we would take an electric toothbrush and just lightly touch her limbs where she couldn't feel anything.

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So, this was part of the alternative therapy that we did. But there was also ongoing rehab therapy. Eventually Encore was able to swim, but there were certain skills that she could do. Things like wave. And back up and spin. Eventually these were things that, because she knew them before they gave me a baseline to know where she was and how much she was improving. So that's lesson number four, is have a baseline for your dog of skills that you know you can ask your dog to do.

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And it lets you know how much they can move their legs, how much they can coordinate backing up or whatever it is that you're going to ask them to do. Have that baseline. For all my dogs, I have them to do move their paws individually, turn their head to one side or another. So have a baseline, create a baseline of what your dog knows. Write it all down right now.

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Now let's fast forward to one year after Encore's catastrophic brain injury. And now she's had two spinal taps. So, the diamond shape in the back of her head because of the high doses of steroids never grew in. She had a bald spot in the back of the head. I personally took it all myself to get her off all of her medication. I kept her on Doxy, and she's been on Doxy every day of her life since then. But I got her off of all of her seizing medication, which we put her back on a very low dose of Phenobarb because my husband was not comfortable with the risk of seeing her seizure again, it just upset him way too much.

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And I got her off of all of the steroids, yet she still had that patch of bare spot in the back of her head. She still was incontinent and peed when she laid down a year later. And her coat now was deteriorating. It was brittle. It was falling out. It was this orangey color, not the bright, vibrant red we were used to. Her immune system couldn't deal with what was going on. Enter our 10-inch worm. When your immune system is so broken down, it can't fight things it would normally fight off. And guess what? There is a worm. It's called *Dracunculus* I believe, it's related to the Guinea worm. You can Google that.



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And it's in ponds all over except dogs are able to fight it off so that it doesn't show up as a worm growing out of their armpit. And guess what? There was a take two, a week later, she got another worm growing out of her ribs, not growing, just emerging from. So, all of this was happening and a year later Encore looked worst than she did before.

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And I said to John, I said, "I think we're going to lose her. I don't think she's going to live until Christmas." Now all of this rehab, I just want to say a big shout out to the people: Lynda Orton-Hill, Louise Lamer from a friend of ours who was a vet tech who actually moved in with us for three months to be with Encore and help her anytime I couldn't be there.

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But with all of this help and all of the friends that were helping with the rehab, even John would help with some of the rehab exercises. Our friend Penny would help with rehab exercises. She was still not moving forward. And that brings me to the fifth lesson. And that is look to alternative modalities. Because as amazing as veterinarian medicine is, traditional medicine has boundaries. Look beyond those boundaries.

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And a friend of mine, my osteopath, when I was telling him this story he said, "Look, why don't we try something called tissue specific microcurrent?" And what we did was we put Encore in the pool. Part of her therapy was in the pool. But in this case, we just had her sit in the pool and Darren put these electrodes in the pool.

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That was the last time Encore ever had an accident peeing herself. One treatment, the incontinence was gone. And a week later I noticed the fur had grown back in the back of her head. And then this bright, vibrant red first started emerging from her face. We continued to give her treatment twice a week, which was amazing to see. And that was a turning point for her.

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So please look to alternative therapies. There's so many different modalities out there that you may not have heard of unless you start looking or you ask, that's a big lesson. Now, the sixth lesson that I learned and it's something we all as dog lovers should know. Appreciate each and every day with your dog. Each and every day.

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I look at that time when Encore was eight years old, every year after that, as a bonus, I have a goal when I get a dog that they're going to live to be 20. I haven't yet achieved that goal, but I keep trying. But honestly, when Encore went down, it was, I just want you for one more day, just one more day girly. And that day turned into a week and turned into a year. And in 11 days, we celebrate Encore's 17th birthday. And to me it's more than just miraculous, having known all she's gone through. She never really fully recovered the use of her front right leg. And unfortunately, the steroid severely damaged the ligaments in her good leg.





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However, she still loves to go for walks every day. She's an amazing dog to this day. And what's more amazing about the fact that she is going to be celebrating her 17th birthday in just over a week is that she's outlived every one of her litter mates by more than three years. She's outlived her parents.

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And so many of you have written in and said, "Could you please talk about what you feed your dogs?" And honestly, I don't believe longevity is about nutrition. I think nutrition absolutely plays a role. I think longevity is about one thing and I'm going to share that one thing and all the out spokes of that one thing in my next episode here on Shaped by Dog.

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All right, I'll give it to you. I'll give it to you to think about. This is my hallucination. I don't know what longevity is all about or what it all amounts to. But I do know this, when Encore reaches her 17th birthday, it will mean the last three dogs I've owned have all celebrated their 17th birthday. So that could be luck on my part, but I've got to think some of the things I'm doing are helping to contribute to the life my dogs get to live. The longevity of those dogs.

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And my last Border Collie, Buzz, outlived his litter mates by years as well. I believe the one thing that is common is stress. Now, of course I'm not discounting genetics, but we're going to get into more of this in my next episode.

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So please hit the notification bell so you will be notified when the next episode is published. Come back here to Shaped by Dog. And if you are listening to this, please subscribe and share this podcast with your friend. We'll talk to you next time. And it will be all about all of the things that I believe contribute to longevity in my dogs. We'll see you next time.

Resources:

[Blog Post: Prayers for Encore](#)

[Blog Post: Answered Prayers](#)

[Blog Post: Encore on the Road to Recovery](#)

[Blog Post: Encore's Rehab . . . A Week at Home!](#)

[Blog Post: Your Dog Recovering From Severe Trauma . . . Is There A Baseline?](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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