

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Over the last several months, I have hinted to the fact that I was going to share a deep dive into some of the history of my, now two-and-a-half year old dog, This!. Some of the things that [we've gone through together](#) and some of the great observations that I've made that I believe are going to help many, many people. So, this is probably going to be a two-part episode, but I can't wait to share all that I've learned so let's jump right into it.

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Imagine this. Imagine you have a 19-month-old performance bred Border Collie. One that comes from a long line of world championship world team dogs. Four generations of dogs from different countries that have been on world teams that have won medals at the world championships. And this 19-month-old puppy is going to go to her first ever seminar with somebody you really respect.

And the best of all is the seminar is at your own facility like it's an environment that your puppy is comfortable in. And to add to the excitement, two of her litter mates are also going to be at the exact same seminar.

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Now, you recognize that one of the littermates is far, far more advanced and you're okay with that. You are excited to show off your skills. Just think about how you would feel knowing that you've got this long line of successful dogs, and this is the third generation that you've owned of the four generations of World Team dogs.

And the seminar begins. It's a nice small seminar, so that's another advantage to these dogs. But at 19 months old, every dog I've ever owned was trialing in agility by the time they were 19 months old. For better or for worse. I don't know that any dog in my future will ever be because of the complexity of the sport and the complexity of the skills. But every other dog I'd ever owned had been in the ring and succeeding by the time they were 19 months old. And This!' grandmother was actually named to her first world team before the age of three.

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And so, the seminar begins, and I get out there and This! falls apart. She will tug for a little bit, but then she disengages and sniffs the floor. I go to something she knows and can do well, like wrap a cone, and she might wrap part of it, and then get wide and slow down and look around.

So, I am not discouraged at all. I recognized this isn't the dog I'm used to training, but I'm going to do things that will make her happy, a restrained recall. She gets excited about the restrained recall, but then won't pick up the toy after.

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Sometimes I'll do a restrained recall in the middle of this workshop and she just wanders off from chasing me and goes and visits strangers. Sometimes acting like she doesn't even know me. And so, I try to do all the things I know she loves to do. Put her through a tunnel, which she might go through fast but at the end won't pick up the toy.



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At one point in the seminar I actually say, "Well, this is going to look great on video when you're on the podium at a world championship." I think that just shows my attitude towards my dogs, that behavior is just information. It doesn't really matter. Would I have wanted her to have had a great time and been ripping around like her litter mate was at the same seminar. On one video you see This! having an absolute meltdown and her litter mates just zipping in and out behind us, having a phenomenal time doing brilliant work.

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Certainly not what I'd wish for, but it was what I had. And so, from that point I knew I needed to dig deeper. And what I'm going to share with you is a timeline of things looking back at the records and know that you can get some realizations when you look at a history, when you look at your experiences that you maybe are not picking up in the moment.

And I think it's super important to share this with everybody because over the past two years of working with This!, I have thought of so many dogs that I've seen at seminars that I've been presenting that have done similar things and I think, "Oh my goodness, you can't dog train something that isn't a dog training problem."

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And that's why I never got discouraged. I knew there was an answer. I just knew that I didn't have it. And as I mentioned in [podcast episode number 189](#), when I sat down and looked at my problems with This! and I thought, "If it's not dog training, let's rule out that suddenly all of your dog training ability fell out of your brains. What else could it be?"

And I came up with those seven things that I mentioned in podcast episode number 189 and big spoiler alert, I believe for This! it came down to primarily nutrition, possibly hormones, and also some discomfort in her own body. A pain and brain fog, I believe.

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So, I'll get to more of that later, but I want to share with you what I observed because I believe there's so many people that are listening or watching this podcast that are going to be able to identify with symptoms that they've seen in their own dogs, maybe current dogs, maybe past dogs.

And so, under the category of 'there are no coincidences,' if you remember in [podcast episode number 36](#) and I'm describing why I picked This! and how I knew she was mine before she was born, I knew what she was going to look like and I declared at birth because I knew, I had a vision of exactly what she was going to look like.

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And her name came from a book I was reading. One of my favorite books called [The Resilience Project](#). Which is really ironic because our journey has become a project of resiliency, both for This! and for myself as a dog trainer. There are no coincidences. In that book there was a young boy from India who was so grateful for everything he saw and had in his life.

And every morning with a big smile on his face he would point to something and say, "This! This is what I'm happy for today. This is what I'm grateful for today." And the big message of the book was the message about gratitude, empathy, and mindfulness, which the irony is not lost on me, that that has been the three most important things in my journey with This!



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I would put the word love in there. And I almost named This! 'Gem' because of the book's gratitude, empathy, and mindfulness. So, This!' story goes back to day three of birth, and she developed diarrhea. And the diarrhea, we had it cultured. Nothing ever came up, nothing ever showed, but it never went away. And so, of course she was treated with antibiotics.

She continued to have diarrhea. One of the other puppies got it maybe a week later, and then the other two had it for maybe a couple of days. And once they were introduced to solid food, all the diarrhea went away.

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And from that point on This! was every bit of normal puppy as the other three puppies in her litter. And at 10 weeks old, all of the puppies were going to their new homes and This!, one of the things I noticed about her is she was a ferocious tugger. She loved to tug. But that last week when they were with me, I did some little puppy grids with them. And I did notice that I'd never seen a puppy use her body the way she did in grids.

In that most puppies, and when we're doing grids we're doing little bumps, and most puppies will come in with two front feet together and punch the ground. And then their back end comes underneath it, punches the ground, and then they go over this little wee bump. All puppies are the same, doesn't matter the breed, it happens the same, but not with This!.

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She came in and split her front legs and as if she was trotting through one, two, and then trotted through with her back legs one, two. I noticed it, I took note of it. I tried to change the distance of the little bump, but I really didn't give it a second thought. Come on, she's a 10-week-old puppy who loves life, who has no care in the world, who's so much fun and is so lovable and is so darn beautiful.

So, she started out, except for that one small thing, similar to the rest of her litter mates. And then the next thing that I noticed was the way she sat. There were two different ways she sat. If she sat straight up, she had her rear paws going very east-west. And sometimes would put an anterior tilt to her pelvis, almost like taking weight off her back it seemed. But it was that east-west leg.

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And I know that I spoke about it [on social media](#). I did a lot of plank work trying to help her to get her legs back underneath her. I wanted her paws in alignment under her knees, in line with her hocks at the back. It took a lot of work, it probably took almost a year.

The other way she liked to sit is to roll back on her pelvis to take all of the weight off of her feet, almost like Tater Salad sits sometimes. Like this big fat cat that just had a big meal. So those were the two ways that she liked to sit as a puppy. Again, I took note, I just thought, "You know, we have different problems. Some puppies like to have sloppy puppy sits. That's cool, I'll just keep working on getting that [nice, tight sit](#)."

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So, from three months to six months, she learned all of our Recaller games. She learned them pretty quickly, but she really lacked that Border Collie drive. Even on a restrained recall she never really got that pull to get away. And if she got a little more excited, she never came out like galloping. She came out loping, maybe a little bit of a run, but never ever driving.



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The only time I ever saw her go crazy with drive was when she got a little bit older and I would let her run with her mother in the field, and then it was like all abandon was gone. And she would hit another gear. She could cut like a Border Collie herding sheep, she was beautiful to watch. But I never allowed that to happen too much because I didn't want that to become an obsession for her.

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And so, I ended up using her love of chasing her mother to transfer value to something that I was having a really tough time with, building any value for staying at my side in [Reinforcement Zone](#), to say walk on a loose leash, she just didn't want to do that. It is now one of her best skills, all because I use the reward of going for a run or going to chase her mother.

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And so, looking back, what I can now see is, she loved chasing birds, too. Chasing birds and chasing her mother were activities of adrenaline. The things that I was asking her to do were things that you would expect a burst of dopamine. But it's like the dopamine hits never happened for her. Or if they did, they happened in very, very, very low doses. Which is why I did a deep dive on dopamine in one of my podcasts, [podcast episode number 174](#).

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And that brings us to something that maybe will be more commonplace and some of these other things that I noticed were nuances. She was developing a lower resiliency to fail. And around seven to nine months is when she started to have serious resource guarding problems and I shared all the things that I did with that in [podcast episode number 66](#).

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As she got older, and I assume started to get more hormonal, she got severely reactive to dogs she didn't know. I mean, she was terrified. Now, there were two things going on. One was it was the summer of 2021, and so we were in and out of lockdown here in Canada, actually more in lockdown than not. And so, other than her early puppy classes, when she was three or four months old, she really didn't get out much.

I forgot to mention she had terrible [car sickness](#) as well. So, the GI problems, I really wasn't connecting at that point. And then the reactivity. So, then we stopped doing anything except working on behavior mod on the [reactivity towards dogs](#).

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And I would use baseball diamonds and conservation areas. And her generalization of some of her games wasn't going as great as I would've expected. I would do them in my house here in a training area downstairs, in my bedroom, in the building, and again it was hit or miss, and I just didn't see her becoming addicted to training the way you would expect a Border Collie would become addicted to training.

Heck, my Bulldog became addicted to training. Little things like if I used a remote feeder, it would take more than like two or three button pushes for the Bulldog to say, "got this," race out for the cookie, race back to try it again.

Where This! would like kind of gallop out to get her cookie, she loved food, and would like, walk her trot back with her little tail going, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing.



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There was never any joy. And that became my number one criteria. Number one, if I can help you to have more [joy in your life](#), your reactivity, your fears are going to go down and your love of work is going to come up. So that became my number one.

And so, I look at these dogs who at certain ages become more reactive and I wonder, are they not dealing with the same problem that This! was dealing with? And it was a combination of nutrition and brain fog. And also around the same time, This! had this unusual startle response to noises.

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Now, Swagger and Momentum are afraid of thunder and afraid of gunshots, Swagger more than Momentum. This! has no problem with thunder or, actually she gets excited. She loves thunder and lightning. No problem with thunder, no problem with gunshots.

But if you dropped something she would pin her ears and leave the room. If she anticipated you were going to drop something, something as simple as your keys or a book, she had an unusually high startle response. And then would develop phobias to areas, so a lot more counter conditioning to help her overcome these fear responses, both to noises but particular to the areas that she was developing these phobias to.

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And so, I look for opportunities to bring joy. I had at that time shaped Tater to chase the squirrels away from the bird feeder. I had a bird feeder on my window. I like to watch the birds eating while I ate my breakfast, and so Tater just had to put up his paws on the window ledge and the squirrels would run away.

And so, I thought that was great. Well, I put it on cue, the cue was the word "squirble". And it didn't take This! long to get in on the act and start screaming and running and barking, and I thought that was amazing. I'd never seen her get excited about anything other than chasing her mother, so I put that on cue for her.

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Now eventually, it became an obsession where she would just rest her head on the windowsill all day waiting for squirrels. So, I had to remove the bird feeder, sadly. Because that's no way for any dog to live either. And that behavior will come back if you say the word "squirble," but it's gone from her just waiting all day for a squirrel to show up.

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And so, it was always about where can I create more joy for this dog? And about the same time between 9 and 12 months, what I also noticed is if I took her out and did any training, if I trained her down in the basement, if I took her out to the building, if I did anything that required her in a thinking brain. It didn't matter if it was a three-minute session, she would come into the house, she would go into my bedroom on my bed, lay out flat, and stay there for two to three hours and decompress.

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It didn't matter what went on, someone could knock on the door, and she would still be there decompressing. Now, she could go for an hour hike and that wouldn't bother her at all. She could chase her mother and we put a GPS on her, and she would go like 15 kilometers on a walk chasing her mother. No decompression needed.



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Only when you put her into her thinking brain, and even for a period as short as five minutes. So, all of these things were obvious to me, and so I decided at a year old, there's no sense even attempting to train agility with her.

Because what was going to happen is this dog who had very little joy for anything, she never said no to training, and she always loved to tug, but I didn't want that blasé attitude to be transferred to agility.

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And so what I did is I focused on her fitness and every week I would work on new exercises. [Carolyn McIntyre](#) would come here and often give me new exercises for her to work on to strengthen her body. We fixed that sit of hers. And I also started doing jump grids, so my good friend [Kim Collins](#) would send me jump grids to do with her.

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And jump grids I thought would be great, because it was an easy predictor for her to get a reinforcement. And there was no thinking because the grids dictated the process for her. But what I know now, is in order to create more dopamine, we really need a negative prediction error and not the same reward all the time.

It actually was never a bad thing. She did the grids, she liked the grids, but she never fell in love like Swagger, by his second week by as a ten-week-old puppy he was obsessed with grids. That never really happened for This!. But it was something that we could do that was building a phenomenal skill in her. Her ability to read distance was amazing, but it was never growing that passion to do the jumps.

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By the time she was 19 months old, leading up to that seminar, she had a lot of great one jump skills. She knew her directionals. She knew a foot target. I would not put her near weave poles. I would not put her near any contact equipment, other than just doing little games on them because again, I didn't want her to walk a dog walk.

But also at that time, her grandmother, Feature, got sick and had cancer, and so my whole focus turned to Feature. And maybe was that good or was that bad for This!? All we did was play games together, and I really wasn't focused on getting anywhere with her training other than again, the criteria of joy.

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And so, I didn't do as many training sessions with her. She did get lots of walks. She [learned to love to swim](#) that summer. And so, I did use the value of the pond to teach her 2x2 weaving which was brilliant. Her weave poles by the pond after just a few weeks, they became amazing. And that's where I did see a glint of joy. And that's when I did believe, oh my gosh, maybe we're going to push through this.

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So, as she progressed her jump grids, I noticed she again, wasn't using her body correctly. And sometimes instead of pushing off with two back paws equally, she would actually leave the ground for the first jump, and as she landed for the second jump, she would rotate her right hip so that her right paw was kind of in the middle of her from behind. So, she only pushed off with her right leg and never used her left leg to push off for the next consecutive jumps.



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And of course, a lot of experts said, "There's something wrong with this dog. She's in a lot of pain. She's got to be dysplastic." And so, when it was possible, Kim took This! down to the foremost experts in the world on orthopedics, my friends [Drs. Sherman and Deb Canapp](#) to give her like bumper to bumper, a thorough workup.

So of course, they ultrasound all her joints. They X-rayed her joints. They put her on their high-tech zillion dollar gait analysis. They measured all of her muscles. They did stance analyzers. And what Sherman said to me after was, "I've never seen a more balanced athlete."

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Usually, dogs favor one side or another. She was perfect. She was 60 40 front to back, and she was 30, 30, 20, 20 in his analysis. Her hips looked beautiful. Her shoulders looked beautiful. Everything looked beautiful. So, I'm slowly checking off my list of seven things that could be causing this dog to not love what I knew she should love.

And that led us up to the seminar where I thought she had those foundational skills. She couldn't do what her older litter mate was doing. He was doing full courses at 19 months, he was amazing. But she still could do one jumps and one tunnel and wrap a cone. That's what I thought. But that's not what I got.

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And shortly after that seminar, Feature passed away. And so, in my journey with Feature, I came to meet an amazing naturopath from Austria, and it took me a few weeks, but then I asked her I said, "Could you help me with This!?" And she of course said yes. And it was a week before my next seminar with This! was supposed to happen. My friend Zeljko Gora from Croatia was coming in.

Now, two more staggering things about This!' progression. One, I can't guarantee has anything to do with her journey, but all of her litter mates grew to be 22 to 22 and a half inches tall, maybe slightly under 22 one of them. Two females, one male, the tallest is one of the females.

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This! was four inches shorter. She stopped growing. She didn't grow a smidge after the age of seven months. She's 18 and a half inches tall. So that was one thing. The other thing is, a normal Border Collie when you're doing jump grids, they will put in a bounce, meaning they'll just hit the ground and push off. And you can keep growing that bounce.

So, for a Border Collie you might start at six feet, and you can grow that out to, Swagger would do 15 feet. Wiggins, one of Momentum's litter mates would bounce 18 feet. But most Border Collies will bounce anywhere from 10 to 15 feet generally in a jump grid.

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And they would add a one stride when it got too big to bounce. So, a one stride would be the dog lands, they take one stride and then they leave for the next jump. And that one stride would grow so that they would one stride 16 feet, 18 feet all the way up to 19 or 20 feet, most Border Collies could. Now again, some of the bigger males could one stride more than that, but on average that's what we got.

Now, I had been doing grids everywhere with This!. I did grids at least three to four days a week. Fun grids. I did grids outside, I did grids inside, I would go to other places and do grids.



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I did so many grids with her, so that was something she knew how to do. That was something that she could predict there'd be a reinforcement.

But even after all those grids, you can see if you jump over to YouTube and watch this video, this is the end of a grid I just did with her. It was a longer grid. It was in the summer of 2022, and immediately after she finished the grid, we were done.

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Grids for me, they would only last a few minutes. I wouldn't ask her for much. Just a few minutes of your time we'll do some grids then we'll go off and do something fun.

And the moment I tell her she can go chase the birds, she takes off like, this is how she ran. She could run so fast after her mother or after birds, but she could not do that in work with me.

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Anything that involved thinking she could not do it. And so, from August until now April, I had worked with Kim Collins' brilliant jumping coach, and we had created some amazing skills and confidence with This!. Because when she was even 15 months old, she would not jump higher than 12 inches. If you put it over 12 inches, she would try to go under it. Would not do it.

With Kim's help, we got her in a set point going up to 22, 24 inches on one jump. But her bounce, she would not bounce more than eight feet. Remember a normal Border Collie, they would bounce maybe 15 feet, but at least 10. She would not bounce more than eight feet. And that one stride, it came in at 15 feet.

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And so, there's a lot of symptoms that I want you, this is a long podcast and that's why it's going to be two parts. There's a lot of symptoms that it's easy to just ignore and go, "That's quirky, that's my dog." Or, "That's the way he holds his *blank*."

But if you put all of these symptoms in order, they will add up to something. And so, you've got to know you cannot dog train something that isn't a dog training problem.

And I'm going to give you a spoiler alert for the next installment of Shaped by Dog where I talk about what I did and where we're at now, is I made some diet changes. And three days after, I had just done a grid where I got a bounce at eight feet and a one stride at 15.

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I did nothing else with her. I changed her diet. I went out and I set up the grid again, and she bounced with power at 8 feet and then bounced 9 feet and then bounced 10 feet and didn't put in a stride until 11 feet and then didn't put in a one stride until 12 feet.

Remember, she would one stride all the way up to 15 and then at 15 feet would put in a second stride. After just changing her diet and doing nothing else, now she not only would one stride 12 feet. She did 13 feet and 14 and 15 all the way up to 20 feet. Nothing changed. She had never once strided beyond 15 feet in her life and suddenly she was one striding up to 20.

So definitely that change of nutrition made a massive difference. It was like a brain fog cleared for her. It was like a pain in her gut was gone.





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And so, in the next Shaped by Dog episode I'm going to share with you why I think This! was so dramatic and knowing I was feeding the best dog food in Canada, and I would put that up with the best dog food anywhere in the world. I'm going to share with you why it wasn't the right food for This!, what I did, all of the retraining that I've been doing since then, and where we're at right now.

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Video: Normalizing Imperfection in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 189: All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You](#)

[Podcast Episode 36: Puppy Selection: How I Do It and Why I Didn't This! Time](#)

[Book: The Resilience Project: Finding Happiness Through Gratitude, Empathy and Mindfulness by Hugh van Cuylenburg](#)

[Instagram Video: Fixing Sloppy Puppy Sits](#)

[Podcast Episode 155: 10 Ways To Teach A Sit WITHOUT A Food Lure! Unreal Results For Puppies And Dogs Of All Ages](#)

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 174: Dopamine In Dog Training: Anticipation, Rewards, And The Transfer Of Value](#)

[Podcast Episode 66: Resource Guarding: Dog vs Dog Aggression](#)

[Podcast Episode 75: Stop Motion Sickness: Helping Your Puppy or Dog Love the Car](#)

[Podcast Episode 111: How An Anchor Dog Can Help Overcome Your Dog's Anxiety Or Reactivity](#)

[Podcast Episode 171: Dog Training With Layered Shaping: Why Classical Conditioning Must Come First](#)

[Carolyn McIntyre Website](#)

[Kim Collins Website](#)

[Podcast Episode 162: Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water](#)

[VOSM: Dr Sherman Canapp and Dr Debra Canapp](#)



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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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