

# Finding Joy Amidst Frustration And Shame In Dog Training – DeCaff's Story Part 2

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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In Shaped by Dog [podcast episode number 229](#), I introduced you to a very, very important dog in my life, actually a mighty dog, my now passed Jack Russell Terrier mix DeCaff, who came into my life over 23 and a half years ago today. In today's episode, I'm going to share with you six more lessons that I learned and a very, very important reflection that I had looking back over my life with DeCaff.

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Hi, I am Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. In our last episode where I shared DeCaff's story with you, I talked about six super important lessons. Lessons that I think about and use, if not daily, at least weekly in my training with myself, with my own dogs, and with my students' dogs.

Lessons such as [puppy selection](#), the importance of using arousal states to lower distraction value or lower fears. Importance of creating a positive environment and who gets to [pick the dog's best number one reinforcement](#). I also shared about [the transfer of value](#) and how you should take a challenge out of the training. How super important that is for your dog.

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In today's episode I've got six brand new lessons equally as important. One very, very painful. I had to rehearse how I was going to share this one with you because it's a biggie for me. Now, the first lesson I'd like to share is [a dog shutting down](#) when you're training them is feedback to you on your training. And let me tell you the backstory on this.

Now, DeCaff was brilliant at some behaviors in agility. She could turn so tightly, and her running contacts were not too difficult to train to her. What was difficult is getting her to open her stride, particularly if it was a spread jump upcoming, or leaving out strides when there was big distances and worst of all, the worst thing for me was her weave poles.

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And her weave poles when we started out were so unbelievably slow. So, a dog of her size might do weave poles in two and a half seconds that might be a good dog of her size, like a fast one. DeCaff was not double that. She wasn't just five seconds. At one point she was like close to 10 seconds.

And I obviously didn't let her rehearse that, I didn't let her do complete sets of weave poles. But the problem was, as I observed it, she would bounce you know, and I just looked at it and thought, this is a Terrier straight in the shoulder.

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She would bounce way up in the air in between each pole. She would bounce so high up in the air that she would sometimes get out of rhythm and had to walk in between to catch up and then that's why things are so slow. Now, those of you who have no interest in agility, you may be thinking, 'Why is this important to me?'

It's super important to you, trust me, because it's just dog behavior. It's just how that [behavior should be feedback to us](#). Now, I asked all my professional friends in the elites of dog agility, and I got some interesting different things I could try.



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One of them was put a rope above her head so that when she bounced, she would touch the rope and then you could just lower the rope to get her to don't bounce as high. Have you met my friend DeCaff? Yeah, the one that doesn't like anything touching her that's new. I knew that wasn't going to work so well. I didn't want to be a negative nelly but that wasn't one that I went too far with.

And so, I kept at it and one day we were practicing weave poles, no ropes involved, we were practicing weave poles, I remember exactly where we were in the building. And I don't know what repetition it was of weaving. I don't know if I was feeling frustrated, but all I know was in the middle of the training my dog stopped.

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She stopped and she would not go back in the weave poles. She looked at me, she sniffed the floor, she sat down, she scratched her collar. [All signs of obvious stress](#). Now DeCaff is not the first dog in the world to ever shut down in training. I can tell you, she's the first dog of mine who ever shut down in training.

And people have said to me, "You know my dog always shuts down." And I would like you to recognize that that dog shutting down to me was like a dagger through my heart because why do I train? I train to bring more joy into your life. What did I just do?

If you and I were just hanging out, sitting on the couch, you wouldn't have had any worry or concern. If you and I were just going for a walk in the woods, you wouldn't have had any reason to look at me with those eyes that you looked at me at with.

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Training's supposed to bring more joy. Training's supposed to deepen our bond. Training's supposed to bring a better relationship. This dog said, "[I don't feel comfortable](#) doing this anymore." Now remember, I did not train this dog with any form of physical corrections or verbal intimidation.

Just like Buzzy, [all of her behaviors were shaped](#), but yet she was as frustrated with training weave poles as I was. And because that moment was so emotionally powerful to me, it never happened again. I would never allow it to happen again.

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I would video my training, I would set timers, [I would journal](#). I just got more intent about it so that I look for any obvious signs of stress and then I would go, 'You've done it again.' And I would go, 'How many sessions could I go where there's no signs of stress?'

Those are the ones that count, not the ones that 'oh, I see a sign of stress' and then I'm going to stop it. Because that leads to the dog shutting down earlier and earlier.

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So that big lesson is that the dog's behavior is nothing more than a critique of your training, your ability to plan the training, and your ability to execute on that training. And so, if the dog is not feeling the joy, then you my friend have flawed in that planning or that executing.

One of the things that I did back then in the early 2000s is I would [give my dogs a time out](#) or I use a [non-reward marker](#) occasionally in weave poles, especially when they would get a wrong entry and the non-reward marker would just say, 'That's not correct. Come on back and try it again.'



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Well, that's one of the big lessons that I got from DeCaff is if you have a well-planned and [well-executed training plan](#), then non-reward markers and timeouts are never required in training; however, never is such an absolute. I want to leave just a little wiggle room.

My goal is to never, ever use non-reward markers, or my goal is to never use timeouts in any of my training, especially with a puppy or a young adolescent dog, that's my goal. And so, if I've planned and executed it and have given my dog amazing foundation, it shouldn't happen.

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Now, what brought me to this was I noticed with DeCaff when I would give her a timeout, I would pick her up to walk her towards her crate. [She would redirect](#), not on me, but she would start growling at other dogs as we went by. When I put her in her crate, she would immediately spin around and start biting the bars of the crate.

It's obvious frustration, aggression, obvious a redirection of the "I don't get what you're doing this to me for because I barely, barely like what we're doing anyway!" And so that was a big neon light to me. And I eliminated any kind of timeouts with her very early in her career when I picked that one up.

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And today, I can't tell you a time where I say, 'I will use a timeout if—.' Now, will I get frustrated and put my dog up? Yes, I will nine times out of ten, I'll put them up with a handful of cookies thrown in their crate because I need the timeout, not the dog needing the timeout.

Lesson number three, never sidestep the lesson the dog is trying to share with you. And if you haven't, please watch my video, [The Journey](#). Because this goes back to how our dogs come into our lives to share lessons with us.

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Now, DeCaff as I've mentioned was very touch sensitive. So, when she was young, with all my dogs I play a game called ['Smack the Baby'](#). Smack the Baby as they tug, I would smack them on the ribs, smack not hard like it would start off just little love pats, and then I'd smack them harder.

Because if you've seen two dogs play, they're very rambunctious. They love to smack each other around.

My dogs love 'Smack the Baby.' And I would play it all over their body. Like at first it would just be in their ribs, and it might be a gentle push, then in their shoulders. And then as they're tugging, I like smack them in their muzzle.

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Well, DeCaff when I played 'Smack the Baby' with her, she loved it up to the shoulders. "We no play Smack the Baby above the shoulders, mama. No." And so, what she would do is as we were playing tug and I'd Smack the Baby and she loved it. As soon as I got near the crest of her shoulder, she just dropped the toy and then bounce around waiting for me to give it to her again.

So, the lesson is, if I was present to that what she was saying, it would've eliminated so many struggles for me later on. Emotions need to be dealt with before you go on and train behaviors.

Now, DeCaff was telling me, "I don't want you to play Smack the Baby because I don't like you touching me there." Now, if we were lying on the couch and I patted her face, there was no problem.



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But here's where the big lesson came to me. I was teaching in Northern California. A student had given me this little toy for her, it was a tiny, tiny little tennis ball on a little rope. I gave it to her. I was on a break. She went out in the ball field, and she was just running with this little toy. And as she ran, it started to bounce.

And as it got higher and higher, eventually it touched her muzzle. She dropped it and then scurried away from it like it had burnt acid all over her face. And then she immediately like dove on the toy again, started running again until it bounced on her face again. Same thing. Spit the toy out. Dove away from it like, "Who did that to me?!"

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The light bulb came on huge for me. I realized at that moment the lesson that I had been sidestepping. The lesson that my dog was trying to guide me to was 'I'm not comfortable with anything touching my face.'

Weave poles, she wasn't bouncing because of a shoulder, she was bouncing to get away from the poles. She didn't want those things touching her shoulders or her face. "Oh, Susan. Oh, the agony you could have done without had you realized that."

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I didn't go back to work right away. I took that ball, and I played tag with her, and I tried one finger to touch her muzzle. She wouldn't let me do it. Alright, that's fine. I know where the counter conditioning can begin.

And so, I worked in my hotel at night. I got her loving Smack the Baby in the face, and a Smack the Baby above the shoulders. And when I got home, I played Smack the Baby into the poles. So, I would put her face up against the weave pole and smack the other side of it as she tugged on the toy. She loved that game.

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Instantly her weave poles got twice as fast as they ever were, like in one session just by teaching her how good it was to have the poles touch her face. The dog's sharing that lesson, be present to the lesson. And emotions, the emotion of fear always, always has got to be the priority in your training over a behavior you just want to train.

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Lesson number four, you will never be able to truly help a dog that you've [labeled or are comparing](#). And I was very good at sticking up for D and calling her 'My D Dog.' But when I would work on things that I was trying to improve with her, things like her stride length and her weave poles, definitely there was you know, moments of frustration. And the frustration had to have come from a place of lack of limitation of 'you're not there yet,' of 'I need this.' And training coming from that place, you are saying that the dog has disappointed you.

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Now, worse than that is people calling their dogs a sucky baby or a bar knocker or an aggressive dog. Because when you put a label on your dog, you've like, [put a limitation](#), a ceiling on who they can become. Because you have immediately said, "My work here is done. I've done the best job I can with a shutdown dog. It's not on me. It's on that dog because that's who the dog is."



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So, it's super, super important when you're training your dog that you acknowledge the limitations, but you focus on the joy and the improvement. You need to shine your light on who that dog is. And don't try to make them be someone they're not.

Guess what? No matter how much encouraging, I could hire the best coaches in the world, and they will never be able to coach me to be anything more than five-foot-two inches tall. However, there's a lot of skills that I could improve.

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By labeling a dog you are considering that their limitation is a part of their physical makeup, it's who they are, and that's just not right. Shine your light on where they are great. For DeCaff, it was 'man, she could turn tight. Man, she had fast contacts. Man, she loved her seesaw.' Those were easy things for me to continue to work on and get better on.

And guess what? At the end of the day, she ended up being one of the most consistent, one of the winningest dogs that I owned in my entire agility career. Okay, this next lesson is a tough one for me to share, and it's about the importance of us as humans to release guilt or shame or any angst we have about our dogs, our past dogs, our current dogs, it doesn't matter.

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So, when DeCaff was younger I had an older Jack Russell Terrier who was pretty much could do no wrong in my mind. Maybe it was because I almost lost her to Parvo when she was nine weeks old. She almost died. It literally was a matter of hours. She had to turn around and she did. That Parvo probably was responsible for her having a heart problem later on in life.

And so, as she got a little weaker, DeCaff who could be snarky with other dogs in the house would [occasionally just jump her](#). For me, it looked like for no reason, she would just jump her like it, you know, it wasn't like she wanted to kill her. But she was attacking, she was grabbing her. There was never any blood.

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And I just turned into this mama bear like, "How dare you do that to Twister?!" And I remember one time, grabbing DeCaff by the collar and just smacking her under the chin. I don't know, two, three, four times I was so enraged because Twister was you know, weak and feeble. And DeCaff who had had some problems with [controlling her emotions](#), but never to that degree.

And so, when I lost Twister, I had a really hard time connecting with DeCaff. There was something in my human brain that saw her behavior in the past as you know, almost human attributes like, "How could you do that to this dog that I loved?"

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There were weeks that went on that I couldn't even train DeCaff. And I'm getting emotional thinking about it. And why am I sharing this story with you? Because I know there's at least one of you listening to this that's hanging on to the same guilt or shame for something you did with your dog.

It doesn't serve you. This world is better when more of us can light it up. Holding on to something that's dark is not contributing to the light of the world. And that really is why we are all here. So, you need to take that baggage and throw it away. It's not who you are, it's something you did.



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Your dog forgives you. You need to forgive yourself. I know as difficult as it was to share that story with each of you, I know I've moved on and I've learned from it. I know that my dogs who lived past DeCaff, that I've had since DeCaff, are better for it. Their lives are fuller, their lives are more enriched because that Susan doesn't live here anymore.

And with DeCaff, when I went through those weeks where I just couldn't train her. One day what I did is I brought a dog bed and I brought DeCaff down to the gym.

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Now I was grieving, and I needed to be okay with how I was feeling and not feeling bad that I couldn't train my dog. And so, I brought a dog bed into the gym and instead of working out, I just sat on the bench, and I would throw her cookies in the dog bed. It was not like I was mean to her at any time after Twister's death, but I just couldn't train her.

And so, every day we'd bring her into the gym, and she'd get into the bed, and I started to work out and throw her cookies. And then one day I got her up on the treadmill while I was on the rowing machine, and we grew from there to me being able to train her again.

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Because it was me just saying, "Let's hang out together. We don't have to accomplish anything. Let's just find some joy in our relationship together." And so that was a very, very tough lesson. But it's super, super important that you don't hang onto any of those dark feelings. They don't allow you to be the best version of yourself today, for the dogs that are in your life today. And they don't serve you to bring out the best in you.

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Lesson number six. How did I take a dog who could barely weave in her first competition (I think it was six seconds before I discovered the dog ball thing) and turn her into a multi-time world champion in dog agility? And a multi-time national champion as far as that goes. How did I do that? I did that because of lesson six.

There's a great book by one of my former coaches, Dan Sullivan. It's a business book, but it's really about excellence and it's called [The Gap and The Gain](#). And so, lesson six is focusing on where you and your dog have improved. There's going to be a gap between where you are today and where you would like to be.

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There'll be a gap between where you are and maybe where your dog's litter mate is, or where you are and where you were with a former dog. There's this gap, and when you measure that gap, you're behind and when you're behind, that sucks. That's not inspiring. That's not moving you to want to get up and do anything.

However, where you are today and where you were last week, there's also something. We're going to call that 'the gain.' How far you've come, where you are today, and where you were last month. When you focus on the gain, you 100% are motivated to get up and go train that dog.

With my current girl, Thisy!, that's [how we move from joy to joy](#). It's never about what we haven't done. It's never about how we're limited. It's never about what we lack. It's all about celebrating that gain.



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And that's what's going to motivate you to keep moving forward with your dog. It's all about connecting with your dog and reminding them how much you love them. You know, we all have a choice to focus on the pain of what we don't have or to be curious about what else we can learn.

To be curious about how to bring more joy into this dog's life, how to bring more joy into your life, into our lives, how to be more grateful. What can I be grateful for today? Those are the things that are contributing to you being excited about getting up and training. And that is the most amazing feeling because it's connecting with that dog.

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Okay, reflections. In that video *The Journey* that I mentioned earlier in this podcast, and again if you haven't watched that video, of all the dog training information I've put out, of all of the content that I have in our online classrooms, if there's one clip, one video, I would want to be my legacy it would be the video, *The Journey*. So please, if you haven't watched it, go back and watch it.

There's a line in there where I talk about our dogs are here to bring us lessons and if we aren't present to the lesson the dog is bringing us it will come back around again.

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I believe This!, my current Border Collie, her challenges, the lessons she brought me about the connection between the gut and behavior, the lessons she brought me about altering diets and protein levels, were the lessons that DeCaff tried to bring me, that I wasn't present or didn't have enough knowledge to figure that out back in 2000.

But all the signs were there. The crazy reactivity as a nine-week-old puppy, her weird dislike of different textures, her weird response to the wind, to other dogs, how sometimes other dogs could be okay but suddenly she would jump somebody in our house.

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There were so many signs that it was a gut - brain connection that was related to the food that she was being fed. And her ability, she was being fed the same food all of my other dogs were being fed, but her gut biome was not in a place where she was able to deal with it.

And when I thought back on this her mother had reactivity issues as well. And you could say, "Well, she was a Jack Russell Terrier," or "She was a dog with a gut biome issue."

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And so, I encourage you to go back and watch *The Journey*. Go back and watch the two episodes, [episode number 203 and 204](#) where I talked about my journey with This!. And also, when you're planning your training, make sure you leave time at the end of every training session to write your thoughts.

Of course, what went well but write down just at the end especially if you're working on overcoming a challenge. What you love best about your dog? What's amazing about them? What are you grateful for today?

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I think if you keep putting notes like that, they're like you're writing your dog and yourself love letters. I give Thisy! a love letter every single day of her life.



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Maybe multiple times for sure before we go to bed, I tell her how much I love her, and I tell her why I think she's so amazing. When you make a habit of being grateful and keep being curious for what else is possible to bring more joy into your dog's life, I promise you it will bring more joy into your life.

I hope you enjoyed me sharing the story of my great girl, Mighty Dog. She certainly was a special girl, as all of my dogs were and are. And I hope what this also can do is have you reflect on your own past dogs. What were the lessons that maybe you missed that possibly you could be present to today? I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 229: Transforming An Overwhelmed And Anxious Dog Into A World Champion - DeCaff's Story Part 1](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 205: The Hidden World Of Reinforcement For Dogs And Why You Need To Know](#)

[Podcast Episode 177: Dog Training Outside The Box: Transfer Of Value Case Study](#)

[Podcast Episode 86: How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs](#)

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

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Body Language, Communication Signals, and How to Read Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

[Podcast Episode 5: What is Shaping And How Can Dogs Shape Us](#)

[Podcast Episode 71: Pro Dog Trainer's Secret to Help Your Naughty Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?](#)

[Podcast Episode 64: Help! How Can I Tell My Dog He's Wrong](#)

[Podcast Episode 172: How To Teach Your Dog Anything With My Training Plan](#)

[Podcast Episode 104: Naughty Dog Behaviors And How To Deal With Them](#)

[YouTube Video: The Journey with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 95: How Playing with Your Dog Like a Puppy Can Reduce Fear](#)

[Podcast Episode 221: Mindshifting Dog Behavior Problems To Overcome Extreme Training Challenges](#)

[Podcast Episode 8: Get Your Dog in the Belief Loop of Awesome](#)

[Podcast Episode 159: Help! My Puppy Is A Bully And Plays Too Rough](#)

[Podcast Episode 217: Understanding Emotional Regulation In Dogs To Create Calm](#)

[The Gap and the Gain: The High Achievers' Guide to Happiness, Confidence, and Success by Dan Sullivan with Dr. Benjamin Hardy](#)

[Podcast Episode 206: First Dog Agility Competition: Creating Joy For This! By Maximizing Reinforcement](#)

[Podcast Episode 203: Reactive, Unmotivated and Fearful: Finding Resiliency For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 204: Dog Behavior And Diet: Recovery For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 208: Brilliance, Resilience And Gratitude: Inspiration And Motivation With Elliott Connie](#)





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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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