

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 1/5/2021

Nick Rusch:

All right, Nick. Thank you very, very much. 8:36 at The Source, and time for our Pet Talk Tuesday. Joining us via the telephone, Dr. Marty Greer. And always a thrill to welcome the doc to the show. Dr. Greer, how are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. How are you?

Nick Rusch:

Good. Good. Very exciting news for you. And I know that you and I had talked about this prior to its publication, but the doctor is now a published author. The new book is *Your Pandemic Puppy: Finding and Raising a Well-Adjusted Dog During COVID-19*. What was the impetus for writing this book?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, there were a couple of things. The stars kind of aligned to point me in the direction of doing this. First of all, I wasn't traveling with my veterinary speaking as much as usual because of COVID. So, I had a little time to be home. Secondly, we were only allowed to see sick and injured patients for about two months, we couldn't see anybody that was routine. And I had a little time on my hands. So, I started thinking about updating the exam room materials that we provide to our clients as puppy handouts and sort of the instruction manual, the operator's manual for a new puppy or a new dog.

And then, I started getting a lot of people talking in my ear about what's going to happen if all these dogs end up not well adjusted, they have separation anxiety, get a little confused when people go back to work and go back to school? What's going to happen to all of them? Are they going to all end up back in the shelter or rescue? So, after a few conversations with other people, I sort of sat down and said, "Well, what can I do about this? Like, I'm not just going to be that arm wavy kind of person that complains about it. Let's do something." So, we did.

Nick Rusch:

I think everybody who has had a little bit of schooling or who has some expertise or anybody who is even a little bit creative, I think most people think that somehow they've got a book in them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

So, going through this process after a while and knowing that you're a busy person between your practice and your home life, and I know that you've got plenty of pets inhabiting your house as well, was there a point that you said to yourself, "Oh, crud. What have I gotten myself into?"

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. A little bit when they got to be close to publication time and the publisher kept saying to me, "You need to write more here. You need to take stuff out here. This is too long. It's too short. You need to do this. You need to do that." Yeah. It started to be just a little overwhelming because it was really important to us that we got the publication done while it was still a pandemic. So, publishing it in two years wouldn't have really solved anybody's problem. So, yes. There was a couple of moments of, "Holy cow. What did I do?" And then, I got over it.

Nick Rusch:

So, let's talk about the subject material a little bit because, on this show, we usually cover ways to make people's lives a little bit easier. I know that's the whole idea of the book as well.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

To make things easier, not only on the pet owner, but on the pet. So, let's dive in a little bit and let's go kind of in order. I mean, if we look at your subtitle, Finding and Raising the Well-Adjusted Dog, what's the best way to go about getting a dog to start with?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. And I think that's a really important question because many times, by the time we see them at the veterinary clinic, they're already entrenched in the new puppy or the new dog. And sometimes they're into a situation, new owners are into a situation, again, that they weren't exactly expecting to get into. So, I think it's important that people look to this book prior to the time that they obtain a dog. Unfortunately, during this period of time, there's been an increasing number of people that want puppies. And, I mean, that's great. So, rescue is empty. Humane Societies are empty. Breeders are having a struggle to keep up with all the demands.

And so, we're going to start to see scoundrels. We're going to start to see people who are underhanded in the way that they get money from people. And we've seen scams happen where there are websites that may suggest that you're going to get a particular dog, and it doesn't work out that way. Or they'll say something like give us \$300 in gift cards and we'll provide you that as a deposit for the puppy. Well, \$300 in gift cards is not the way you pay for a puppy. They may say to you, "Well, we'll meet you at a rest stop because we don't want you to have to drive out to the country and see if you can get lost." Well, really what they're telling you is their facility isn't suitable for you to look at. And so, they're trying to hide something.

So, it's really important that you go through the process of carefully selecting the breeder, or the rescue, or the humane society, whatever organization you decide to go with. And you do some investigation before you get the dog and make sure that you're getting a dog that is the quality dog and the type of dog that you really think you're looking for.

Nick Rusch:

It's harder than it should be because there are so many scam artists out there. And you really have to have your antenna up and your radar on to kind of weed out the wheat from the chaff. And it's like you said.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, yeah.

Nick Rusch:

Responsible breeder. And I'm sure that you guys, in your capacity, you can probably recommend several responsible breeders that you've had contact with.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes. We can. That's the really good news about our practice is, because we work with so many breeder clients, we know who the good ones are. We can find you a dog of almost any breed, depending on what you're looking for, breed or mixed breed, purpose bred, or randomly bred. There's a lot of choices that people have to make. But, with veterinary input, whether it's our clinic or the clinic that you're previously going to, I think it's really important that you involve your veterinary team before you make a decision that's going to spend the next 15 years with you. Dog or cat, it's going to be a long relationship if things go well. It's not like buying a toaster. It's a whole different thing. You can't just take it off the shelf, decide it didn't work out, and return it to the store or throw it in the trash because it was a ten dollar toaster.

But what you really have to look at is what kind of features, what kind of things you want looking at a dog. You can look at indoor activity level and outdoor activity level, hair coat, do they shed, do they not shed? If they don't shed, they need to be groomed every six to eight weeks, which means a trip to the groomer and the expense that goes to that. If they shed, that means you're going to buy a new vacuum cleaner every year. You just have to really figure it out. Little dog, big dog.

If you're a senior, if you're a boomer, getting a dog that's randomly bred might not be a really good choice because you don't know what size or what type of dog it's going to turn into. If you're a millennial and you have the space, it doesn't matter to you quite as much as it does a boomer if your dog ends up to be 120 pounds. But a boomer 15 years from now is going to be pretty old. And a dog that turns out to be 120 pounds when you're 70 and you get it, and then you turn 85 and the dog is still with you, how are you going to get that dog in and out of the car if you need to go to the vet? How are you going to get it in and out of the house to go potty? So, there's a lot of things that you need to think about that initially may not seem important when you're just looking at how cute the little fuzzy creature in front of you is.

So, you have to think with your head and with your heart. And so, the book lays out a chart that gives you different criteria by which you can make decisions and ask questions of the breeder, or the rescue, or the Humane Society, so that you make a really well-informed decision. Because this should be a forever decision, not a temporary, oh, well, we'll see how it works out, and if it doesn't work out, we'll move on. That's not good for you, and that's not good for the dog.

Nick Rusch:

Are there things to look for, doc? And I know that you mentioned that shelters have not been able to keep up with demand during the pandemic. They just haven't been able to, which is a nice problem to have, I guess, in some ways. But are there red flags or things you should look at when you go to adopt a dog from a shelter?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

And they're doing the best they can, but are there certain things that you look at and say, "Well, gee. This is something to keep an eye out for."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. And I have to be really honest. And this saddens me to say this, so I'm not trying to be critical of rescue or Humane Societies because they're doing a really important job and working very hard at it. But years ago, if a dog had a serious behavioral issue, it was aggressive toward people, that dog was never placed in a home. That dog would have been assessed. And there are techniques that people use to try and determine if a dog has food bowl aggressive, or dog aggressive, other things that there are pretty well established techniques that we can use to assess those dogs. And, unfortunately, as the demand has increased and as people have become more sensitized to the desire to have a no kill shelter, some of these dogs and cats are ending up in family homes that previously would not have. Previously, if their behavior had been what it is, they would have been euthanized before they were ever placed in a home.

And unfortunately, we're seeing an increasing number of dogs that are aggressive and/or fearful being placed in homes as suitable family pets. When, in reality, some of these dogs will never become a suitable family pet, or they may not be a suitable family pet when there are children, or men in the house, and things like that. And it's pretty hard to know that you're never going to have a kid in the house, you're never going to have a male person in the house, you're never going to have some of those things happen. And so, it saddens me to say this, but we have seen some pretty scary dogs coming into people's homes. And those are dogs that really shouldn't have been there.

Now, fearfulness is a different discussion. And we see a lot of dogs with separation, anxiety and other fearful behaviors. So, we're certainly seeing an increase in the number of behavioral consultations that we need to provide to clients. And we're happy to do that. I'm trained in behavioral work. And so, we're happy to help out with that, both behavioral modification and medications to help with that.

But I just think people need to ask very carefully before they take the dog from the Humane Society or the shelter, what this dog behavioral assessment was, and have a really significant sit down heart to heart with you and your family, people that may be involved in the dog's upbringing, to see if you can really adjust your lifestyle to fit that dog's needs. And, if the answer is no, be honest with yourself, be honest with the shelter. They're not going to look badly upon you for saying, "This dog just isn't the right one for me. I'm going to pass on it and wait for another one to come along." I think people really need to be very soul searching and really honest, before they get into a situation that turns out to be an unfortunate one.

Nick Rusch:

And, as you mentioned before, a cute, warm, and fuzzy thing is a wonderful thing, but sometimes that may not be the correct dog for you. You've got to look a little deeper than skin deep or fur deep, as the case may be.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

To make sure it's the right fit. Because, as you said, it's going to be a long-term relationship. And it's going to be a creature that you're going to be spending some time with. If you're a responsible owner and if you're a good owner, we would assume you're going to be spending a fair amount of time with the animal. So, you want it to work out. You want it to be the right fit. You don't want to just go in blindly. But-

Dr. Marty Greer:

And some dogs don't really show their true colors for the first 90 days. So, they may come into your house and look like they're pretty good, but 90 days in, things make shift seismically.

Nick Rusch:

Right. And then, what do you do?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nick Rusch:

So, now that we've talked a little bit about selecting the dog, or that, or animal up front, let's talk about the specific challenges. I know we've covered this a little bit in past conversations, but let's talk about the specific challenges that COVID has brought for, not only new pet owners, but for pet owners in general.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And one of the things that we've noticed at the veterinary clinic is some dogs have not been seeing people in masks. So, the first time that they come to our practice or you take them anywhere, whether it's the pet store or if the local hardware store let's you take the dog inside... we used to be able to go shopping with our dogs at PetSmart and some of the pet stores. But now, they've really restricted the number of consumers that can come inside. So, it's changed things. But the first time that a dog sees a human in a mask, or even sometimes different styles of masks, can really throw the dog off.

And I was speaking to a friend of mine that's a veterinarian, but he's retired, so he hasn't been in practice during this whole period. He hadn't even thought about what that does. But, when the dogs look at us and we're wearing a covering over the part of our body that they're used to reading half of our face, they don't quite know how to take it. And some dogs are struggling to understand our facial features without being able to see our whole face. So, that's number one.

And number two, like I said, getting them out and socializing them has become a lot more difficult. You used to be able to go on long walks, and go to the playground, and let your dog hang out with other kids and with other dogs. And now, that's just really not an option. So, it's been a lot more difficult to get a new puppy socialized. A lot of the dog training classes were shut down for a while. A lot of the facilities had space in them because people weren't traveling, so they weren't going on vacation, leaving their dogs at the boarding kennel. But, on the other hand, if you weren't working and you were at home, or you were working from home and you didn't need to take your dog to doggie daycare or to a socialization class, those opportunities kind of went away.

And it's really hard to socialize a dog via Zoom. You can still have your meetings with Zoom and you can still communicate, but your dog is not going to get much out of a dog training class that isn't taught with other dogs in the room. So, you can have some one-on-one behavioral assistance. And there are people that are offering a telemedicine

behavioral assistance service for dogs that are having behavioral issues, but it's not the same as being in the room with the dog. And it's not the same as having dogs in the rooms with each other. So, there's been a lot of changes that we have to adjust to in managing our dogs social behavior.

Nick Rusch:

Interesting that you brought up the masks because, not only from the standpoint of, they can't see our expressions, but I think sometimes people don't realize how much dogs do... the cues they take from you. And part of it is from your body language, part of it's from your smell. But part of it is definitely from your facial expression. Sometimes it's not even so much of what you're saying, but it's how you're saying it. And the cues that they're getting from, as you mentioned, half of your face is gone. So, it's very difficult for the dog, who communicates most of his things with his ears, it's very difficult for him to pick up those cues.

And I wouldn't have thought of that. Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. And, if you ever walked into a store and you can see your video up above your head on the screen, because they'll sometimes show you those, and you have on your hat, your sunglasses, and your mask, and you walk into a veterinary clinic like that, the dog has nothing that they can read at all. Your head is covered with something strange. Your glasses are on. Your dark glasses are on. You've got a mask on your face. The dog is completely lost. All they get now is your physical body language. And that may not be enough for the dog to really understand how they're supposed to respond and react. So, I think they almost look at us like, "Why are they muzzled? Like what did they do wrong?"

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So, it's just kind of an interesting way to look at how our dogs are needing to interact with us. And, like I said, the puppy training classes, the dog training classes, they've been really difficult. We haven't been allowed to have large gatherings, so we've had to limit the number of people in classes. And again, you still have to wear masks, and you still have these other limitations.

So, we've suggested things like, okay, go to the store and buy three different kinds of bathmats. And I know that sounds weird, but you can put those down on your floor in your house and the dog can then get used to walking on different surfaces because now the dog that you would have taken on a walk, or you would have taken to a friend's house, or taken to Home Depot, or wherever, you can't do those things right now. So, we need to introduce new things into the dog's existence.

A new puppy, the rule of thumb is a hundred experiences in a hundred days. And that requires an awful lot of work when you are sitting in your small house without a lot of other options for you. So, that means a new toy, a new surface. Sometimes just an empty milk jug or an empty laundry soap bottle that you've rinsed out can be the new toy for one day. But you have to come up with a hundred things in a hundred days. Wow. That's going to stretch your limit on your imagination pretty fast. So, you do have to work a lot harder at it than what we were doing before. And it's even more important now because some of these dogs are coming without great social skills. So, we have a balancing act of managing a dog that doesn't have great social skills with the inability to socialize them well. So, things have gotten really challenging.

Nick Rusch:

And I know I ask you this question all the time pertaining to different things, but is it possible that, as we go through this, it's easier on some breeds than others? I mean, I would guess those super active dogs with a lot of brain function, I'm thinking of the breeds like border collies... I mean, I would think it would be so hard to keep them entertained, interested, involved, out of trouble in this situation.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. You are absolutely right. That's a great insight. And, yes. It's very difficult. And some of the small dogs tend to be the ones that are least social. They are very bonded to the one person that they live with. And, if that's the only person that they see, and then six months into the relationship, they finally come to the vet or they go to a training class, they're going to be a lot more difficult for them to adjust because they have really, really bonded to that person. And, while the bonding is a great thing, the inability to be flexible with meeting other people is not a great thing. And so, those dogs are very protective. Many times they're sitting in an owner's lap at the veterinary clinic, we reach over to pick them up and put them on the exam table. And they're like, "Oh, no. You're not coming one step closer to my person, because this person is the best thing that's ever happened to me."

And I can pretty much read, in the exam room, which dogs are going to have separation anxiety before the owner ever tells me if they're going to have it or not just by how the dog is sitting in their lap and how they're clinging to the dog. I see this relationship. And I'm like, "So, do you think you've had any trouble with separation anxiety?" And they're like, "Oh, how did you know that?" "Well, let me just tell you. It's pretty obvious. Your dog is sending me signals about this."

So, the book addresses both medical care and behavioral care. And one of the really important emphasis in the book is separation anxiety, how to deal with it, how to prevent it, what to do before it develops in your young dog. When you start thinking that your work schedule is going to change, or your school schedule is going to change, the kids are going back to school, you're going back to work, we need to start adjusting the dog to a new schedule, to a new lifestyle so that they can adjust to the fact that you are not home 24 hours a day seven days a week, and at their beck and call at every need that they have. So, I think it's really a good idea to get ahold of the book and go through some of the behavioral things.

The book also goes through medical things like flea and tick control, the new medications. There's a new one on the market now that does fleas, ticks, and heartworm all in one pill. It goes through spaying and neutering. It goes through vaccination. So, it goes through all of the veterinary medical care that we need in the dog's first 18 months of life. But it also goes through a lot of the behavior, the basics of sit, down, stay, come, emergency down, separation anxiety, walking on a leash, all those skills that dogs need to have as a life skill so that they can very readily continue to live a happy life in your household and not end up having to go back to a shelter or go someplace else because their lifestyle and yours didn't match.

Nick Rusch:

I have to ask you this, just looking at the cover. There's an adorable Corgi on the cover. And I know you have corgis. Is that one of yours?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is not. Can you believe that? This is actually the second book that I've published and they both have Corgis on the cover. And neither of them are mine. I didn't even pick out the cover. The publisher did.

Nick Rusch:

I thought so.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We were trying to come up with a cover that illustrated that it was a pandemic, but didn't have a mask on the dog like front and center, because it's kind of offensive to some people to have to wear masks and offensive to other people to not wear masks. So, we tried to make it kind of a play on it. And so, once you see the cover of the book, you'll understand it. I'm going to leave it at that so people can go to the website.

Nick Rusch:

Yes.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And take a look at Yourpandemicpuppy.com. Or you can purchase the book on Amazon. It's an Amazon publication. So, I had a terrific publisher who did a beautiful job of layout. The cover is nice. It's a pretty book. It feels nice. The layout is easy to read. I think she did an outstanding job of taking a lot of material that I put together in just a word document and sent it to her and magically, poof, it came out the other side is 178 page book with a lovely feel to it. So, I'm really pleased with the publisher's ability to turn what I thought was kind of boring veterinary material into something that looks like a fun read.

Nick Rusch:

It's funny because you and I have talked so many times before, this is like a completely... I'm talking to you like I normally talk to an author, which you are, but it's a different interview. I was about to plug the book one more time, and then usually that's when we let somebody go. The book is, then this is what I would do. The book is *Your Pandemic Puppy: Finding and Raising a Well-Adjusted Dog During COVID-19*. It's available at amazon.com. And the author is Dr. Marty Greer. Thanks for being with us, Dr. Greer. But now, I have to ask you to tell us also your contact information, so in case people need to have direct contact with you about their dogs. You've got 30 seconds, doc.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Great. It's smallanimalclinic.com or veterinaryvillage.com, if you can spell veterinary. The phone is (920) 269-4000. We're at the corner of Highway 41 and 49, right where Quad Graphics is. So, we're catty corner across from them. And we are open seven days a week for your pet's needs. So, we're happy to see you.

Nick Rusch:

Pet Talk Tuesday with Dr. Marty Greer. One of our favorites always. And doc, congratulations, once again, as well. Great job as always.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you so much.